

Graveyard Statistics



Area: City and County of San Francisco, California
Birth range: 01950 +/- 10 years
Death range: 01989 +/- 10 years

"The reluctance of prominent people to publicly acknowledge their AIDS diagnoses left obituary columns strangely empty of actual flesh-and-blood people who were dying of the syndrome. Only the most knowledgeable of obituary readers could detect the presence of this epidemic in the death notices. A thirty-eight-year-old fashion designer dying of "cancer and pneumonia", for example, was a sure giveaway, as was the man in his thirties who left no surviving widow after succumbing to a "lingering" or "lengthy" illness."

Randy Shilts, 'And the Band Played On', St. Martin's Press, 01987,
pages 472-3

I have been reading Randy Shilts' 'And the Band Played On', a fascinating book written as an interwoven collection of stories of those who first discovered Human Immunodeficiency Virus, those who lived and died with it, and those who worked to fight it.

I saw the above quote from Shilts' book and I thought about looking into Find A Grave to see what information on GRID deaths ("gay-related immunity disease" was a handle given to the phenomena in the early 80s, before HIV was formally distinguished from the HTLV family of retroviruses) was available.

AIDS is unique in human history in that, although it originated in southern Africa, it was the first infectious disease in human history to be globalised via the United States of America:

Table 1. DISTRIBUTION OF REPORTED CASES OF AIDS IN THE WORLD, BY COUNTRY

	N	Percent
Americas	131,250	66%
U.S.	110,333	
Brazil	7,787	
Canada	2,996	
Mexico	2,683	
Haiti	2,215	
All others	5,236	
Europe	28,367	14%
France	8,025	
Italy	4,663	
FR Germany	4,093	
Spain	3,965	
United Kingdom	2,649	
Switzerland	1,046	
Netherlands	983	
All others	2,943	
Africa	36,279	18%
Uganda	7,375	
Kenya	6,004	
Zaire	4,636	
Tanzania	4,158	
Malawi	2,586	
Burundi	1,975	
Zambia	1,892	
Rwanda	1,302	
All others	6,351	
Western Pacific	1,902	1%
East Mediterranean	299	<<1%
Southeast Asia	68	<<1%
Total	198,163	100%

Reported to WHO through December 1, 1989 (AIDS [1990; 4:93-97])

Source: Ending the HIV Epidemic: Community Strategies in Disease and Health Promotion, 01990

Promiscuous gay sex and intravenous narcotics abuse spread the virus. A lack of screening of blood plasma donors, and a long latency period in victims before health effects became noticeable, contributed to the epidemic spreading out of control.

Total Find A Grave memorials

(including those interred outside San Francisco): 495

Average age at death: 40

Veterans: 196 (about 39.5% of the total)

Women: appr. 60 (about 12% of the total)

Year of death

01979 - 18	01990 - 52
01980 - 4	01991 - 55
01981 - 7	01992 - 34
01982 - 12	01993 - 18
01983 - 13	01994 - 23
01984 - 27	01995 - 17
01985 - 29	01996 - 17
01986 - 27	01997 - 11
01987 - 27	01998 - 4
01988 - 46	01999 - 11
01989 - 42	

Age at death (rounding down if date of birth not specified)

18 - 3	40 – 37
20 - 1	41 - 29
21 - 1	42 - 31

22 - 1	43 - 23
24 - 1	44 - 31
25 - 1	45 - 18
26 - 2	46 - 22
27 - 5	47 - 19
28 - 7	48 - 13
29 - 7	49 - 12
30 - 12	50 - 14
31 - 13	51 - 13
32 - 9	52 - 5
33 - 13	53 - 4
34 - 17	54 - 5
35 - 18	55 - 1
36 - 32	56 - 3
37 - 29	
38 - 18	
39 - 25	

Causes of death when specified

AIDS-related - 43
Aviation crash - 1
Cancer n.o.s. - 1
"Gunshot wound" - 1
Liver disease - 1
Murder - 1
Suicide - 1

What was most immediately striking to me was the disparity between the number of women who died to the number of men. (This is accurate to within two or three people, given unisex names, missing first names, etc.) GRID disproportionately affected men, and men have a

lower life expectancy in every study I've read about. But that nearly 9 of 10 deaths were men was remarkable to me.

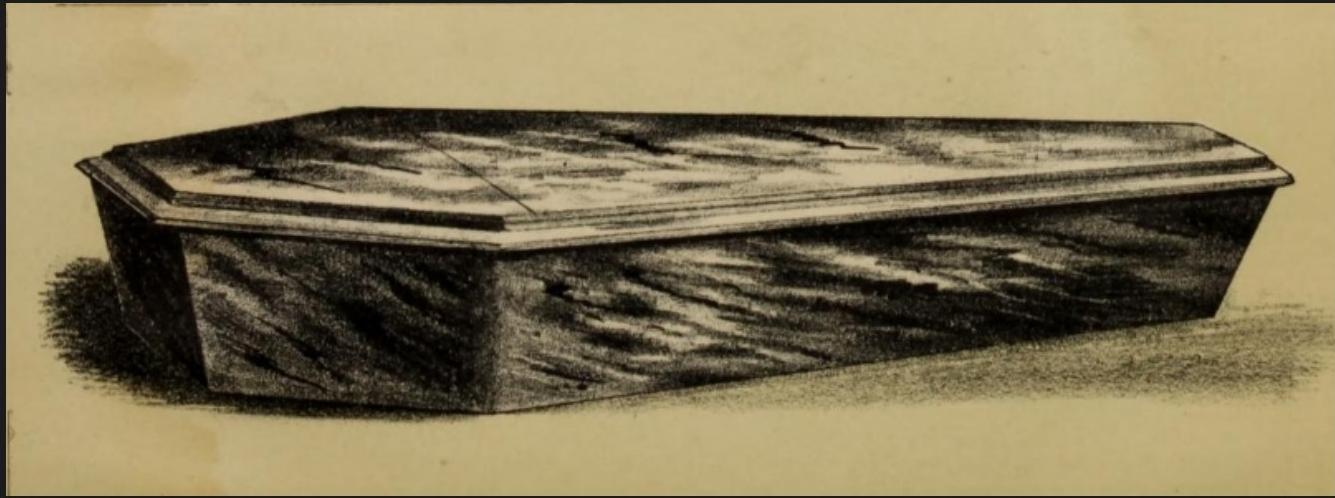
Less than 10% of these memorials on Find A Grave disclosed the cause of death, either in the web form or a photograph of a cutout of the obituary. However, even when not specifically disclosed, there were indications that gave me plenty to believe that many of these men died from a GRID. Red ribbon flowers left on their memorial, obituaries in which donations to AIDS research were suggested in lieu of flowers, etc., were just such telltale signs as mentioned in the quote from Shilts' book.

The long latency of HIV is also evident in the death count by year. The increase in deaths by the mid-80s described in 'And the Band Played On' is evident here, as men who were involved in the San Francisco gay bathhouse scene in the early 80s began dying in the following years, followed by a tapering in the mid-90s.

Regardless of the cause of death, the likelihood of death in my selected brackets surprisingly did not increase with age. With age 18 being the youngest and age 56 being the oldest, the age with the highest number of deaths was actually the same as the average out of the total: 40 years of age. As many 18-year-olds died as 56-

year-olds. 194 men in their thirties died to 235 men in their forties.

Also interesting was the fact that almost 40% of those who died were listed on Find A Grave as military veterans, many of them with Vietnam service. This is of course because burials within the limited green space of San Francisco County are weighted heavily towards San Francisco National Cemetery. However, that does not explain why so many servicemen died quite young, and most veteran memorials on Find A Grave have very little biographical information. We are of course now aware of the long-term carcinogenic effects of Agent Orange, which an undetermined number of servicemen were exposed to in Vietnam and elsewhere (such as CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick, where it was first tested). Exposure to this and other chemicals, and to ionising radiation from an abundance of sunshine and from high-altitude flight may have been the cause of a disproportionate amount of cancer in servicemen, especially those who contracted HIV.



“You can’t win, ‘cause time can’t lose.”
- Cheap Trick, “Tonight It’s You”

All findings courtesy of FindAGrave.com.
<https://www.findagrave.com/user/profile/50187860>